

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

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Investigation of:

MV ETHAN ALLEN,
LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK,
OCTOBER 2, 2005

Docket No.: DCA-06-MM-001

* * * * *

Interview of: STAN WILUSZ

National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, DC 20594

Tuesday,
December 13, 2005

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to
notice.

BEFORE: BOB FORD

APPEARANCES:

BOB FORD
National Transportation Safety Board

BRIAN CURTIS

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Stan Wilusz:

By Mr. Ford

3

I N T E R V I E W

INTERVIEW OF STAN WILUSZ

1 THE WITNESS: -- and basically it was the basic haul
2
3 with a doghouse on the back for the helmsman, and you scooched
4 down below to go to the head. And then it was a flat deck,
5 basically level with the gunnel at the after end of the boat
6 there, by the doghouse, to ease the passengers on and off,
7 boarding, and for them to be able to sit kind of high and look
8 out on the -- on the tour. What was mounted to the deck
9 were -- these wooden park benches, you know. They are slatted
10 park benches, and they were bolted to the deck so you could
11 put, you know, two to three people per seat, depending on their
12 size.
13

14 I can't remember, but I think the boats were licensed
15 for 44 or 49 passengers, it seems to me. Down below the boat
16 was basically empty. It had a -- I believe it was a six-
17 cylinder Perkins diesel in it, as I recall. There was no
18 ballast or anything down there, just a plenty, empty, hollow
19 haul, with a diesel sitting there. The superstructure around
20 the boat above the gunnel consisted of -- as I recall, it was
21 maybe an inch and a quarter, inch and a half, open pipe
22 railing. And there was a superstructure of the same pipe that
23 kind of went overhead and kind of crisscrossed. There was like
24 four posts in it. It kind of crisscrossed over the top, and
25 there was some lighter tubing and speakers mounted on it. But

1 it was totally open. You had no protection from the -- any of
2 the elements, okay?

3 MR. FORD: Um-hum.

4 THE WITNESS: Now in the spring of 1966 -- and I
5 don't know, it might have been May or something like that -- it
6 was before the boat was put in service. And I think it was
7 '66. I don't think it was '65, but you'll be able to find out
8 the exact date, I'm sure. They did a stability test on it.
9 And, of course, we're talking 40-some years ago, and it
10 probably wasn't as sophisticated as they do it today. But
11 their at Whaling City Dock and Dredge, they had a number of
12 sandbags that they put on the side of the boat and induced
13 significant heel to the boat. And it was witnessed by the
14 Coast Guard, and the next thing I knew the boats were -- we
15 only had one -- we might have had more. But anyway, the boat
16 was licensed to carry passengers. I don't know what the
17 restrictions were on the boat, but I'm assuming it was, you
18 know, in shore waters for sure. I had a 100-ton offshore
19 license, but that boat was not an offshore boat by any stretch
20 of the imagination.

21 We never really experienced any problems with the
22 boat. People -- you know, we carried a lot of passengers. It
23 used to be a very, very popular tour. And the boats ran fine
24 there on the Thames River. Now there was one occasion, as I
25 said in the

1 e-mail. Every -- and I don't know if they still do it now, but
2 in the past there was a big event on the Thames River. And
3 that was the Yale-Harvard boat race, where they have these 12
4 or 14-man rowing boats. And they'd race down -- I think it's
5 from Gail's Ferry down there to the Gold Star Memorial Bridge,
6 there in Groton, across from Groton and New London. In those
7 days there would be hundreds of boats watching the regatta from
8 the two schools. We always were chartered to take passengers
9 from a hotel way down at the mouth of the Thames River in
10 Groton. It was a big, wooden hotel. The name escapes me. I
11 think it's gone now. But it's was an old fashioned, monstrous
12 hotel. And we would take passengers on a charter up to watch
13 the race. And as I recall, you know, we had 30 to 40 people on
14 the boat, and some big coolers for lunches and soft drinks and
15 beer and whatnot.

16 On return, coming down the Thames River, the river
17 was really, really sloppy, because a lot of boats are racing to
18 leave the regatta event. And there was a really confused sea
19 with a lot of weight and a lot of wave action caused by the
20 wakes. And I was running back down to the hotel, and those
21 wakes caught that right stern quarter on the starboard side,
22 stern quarter, and kind of lifted her up. And she -- you can
23 tell in the pit of your stomach when a boat kind of tips just a
24 little bit too far. Do you know what I mean? She just
25 didn't -- she got very, very uncomfortable, and I had to

1 quickly steer off. I was far enough away from the
2 shorelines -- quickly steer off and run down a ways before I
3 went back up again. And it was -- it was real tender at that
4 moment. And I attributed it to the number of passengers being
5 high on the deck. And we never experienced any kind of weight
6 action on the tours like that. And other than that the boats
7 performed fine.

8 When I saw the picture in the Soundings I immediately
9 recognized the boat, because I recognized the little doghouse
10 on the back and the shape of the transom is very -- you know,
11 it stuck in my mind it's very classic New England. It started
12 about the '40s with one style haul. And I just recognized it
13 immediately. And then when I read the article and I saw that
14 the boats had been purchased in Connecticut years back, I knew
15 immediately that that was the Dyer 40s we ran. I cannot tell
16 from the photograph much, but it's clear that an additional
17 superstructure was added to the top of the boat. I don't know
18 what that cover is made out of, if it's a hard top, and how
19 heavy the railings are and (indiscernible). But I can tell you
20 that my experience, based upon just the open railing, the open
21 thing, with the number of passengers and the weight action, I
22 would say it was three, maybe four feet, as I recall. This is
23 a long time ago. It scared me enough that I remembered it.
24 Certainly with that kind of weight up high like that, that it
25 would be extremely tender. And unless a guy recognized it

1 immediately for what it was, that it ran off on the way, he
2 could find himself in trouble.

3 MR. FORD: Okay.

4 BY MR. FORD:

5 Q. Let me ask you -- let me just get some -- double
6 check some information.

7 A. Sure.

8 Q. What year did you start working for them and what
9 year did you finish working for them?

10 A. I started -- it was either -- it was either June 1965
11 or June 1966, or May 1966. I can't remember exactly if it was
12 '65 or '66. I ran -- but for sure, '66 and '67. And I stayed
13 on during the fall and ran the boats doing some odds and end
14 for Whaling City Dock and Dredge, until I went into the Air
15 Force. I went into pilot training. So I left Whaling City in
16 November 1967, end of October, first part of November.

17 Q. Okay. So your background then was -- were you in the
18 Air Force?

19 A. Yeah, after -- when I first started off, my father
20 was in the charter boat business. I got my hundred-ton license
21 when I was 18 and we ran a charter boat out of New London,
22 Connecticut. He retired from the business. I was a school
23 teacher in Guilford, Connecticut. And I was filling my summer
24 times to earn extra money, working boats. I ended up working
25 for Clarence Sharp there at the Whaling City Dock and Dredge.

1 I knew some of the other boat captains from my -- from the New
2 London area, and a couple of them were working up there, and
3 they told me they were looking for a guy. So I went up and
4 interviewed and got hired.

5 Q. Okay. Clarence Sharp, he died, from what I
6 understand, in 1974.

7 A. Yeah, yeah. They named a highway after him there in
8 Groton.

9 Q. Oh, really, okay.

10 A. Yeah, if you go into Groton you'll discover there's a
11 Clarence Sharp Parkway or something. He was quite a month. I
12 don't know that Whaling City Dock and Dredge is in business
13 anymore, but it was a big operation there at the Groton side of
14 the Gold Star Memorial Bridge, almost underneath the bridge.
15 And he built -- the Whaling City Dock and Dredge built the
16 piers, the pier superstructure for the Newport Bridge. And
17 when they added a second bridge to the Gold Star Memorial, he
18 also -- his company also built that -- those piers. So they
19 were into heavy construction. They had all kinds of equipment
20 there in the yard. He built a floating dock with a walkway and
21 a canvas top. And he was quite a promoter of Groton,
22 Connecticut, and the submarine base. And he had -- I know he
23 had a fairly good staff there that worked for them.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. They also had a tug boat called the "Battalure,"

1 which was used to assist dock the nuke boats that would come
2 into General Dynamics Electric Boat there in Groton. So I
3 worked deckhand on that when I was running the tour boats.

4 Q. Okay. Well, do you remember any other employees of
5 Whaling City that --

6 A. Yeah, one of the boat captains was a fellow by the
7 name of Joe Krawjewski, K-R-A-W-J-E-W-S-K-I. But I think -- I
8 was the young pup, and all these guys, I'm sure, are passed
9 away by now. The guy that was kind of like the manager of the
10 tour boat operations was a guy by the name of Bob Edwards, and
11 Bob was from -- oh, he might have been from Martha's Vineyard
12 or Nantucket or somewhere up that way. But again, you know,
13 I'm 63 so, golly, I'm not too sure any of these guys are alive
14 anymore.

15 Q. Right. You know, I've been trying to track down Mr.
16 Edwards, because from what I understand he did a lot -- a lot
17 of the managing of the company. And someone I know did a
18 search and the information, if it's the same man, he died in
19 '87.

20 A. It wouldn't surprise me. This is Bob Edwards?

21 Q. Yes. But from what I understand, he might have owned
22 a marine supply company, also?

23 A. He had some background in the marine business, and I
24 don't remember what it was. And I think he came from up in
25 Massachusetts. I thought it was one of the islands. Yeah,

1 that's what I remember about him.

2 Q. Okay. Well, would you recall any other boatyards in
3 Groton that might have done work on the Ethan Allen?

4 A. He did the boat -- we did it right there at Whaling
5 City.

6 Q. They did all the repairs themselves?

7 A. Yeah, yeah, because they had a complete -- you know,
8 they had barges and they had pile drivers and they had cranes
9 and everything else. When we would do the bottom work, like
10 that, on the boat, they'd put slings on it and lift it right
11 out of the water and put it up on the barge and, you know,
12 paint the bottom and, you know, do all that kind of stuff.
13 They had a yard mechanic that worked on the boats. It was an
14 Italian last name. And he did all the engine work. And I'm
15 sure he's long gone, too, because he was -- you know, he was
16 probably in his late 40s or early 50s back then. And, yeah,
17 that's where -- all the work was done right there at Whaling
18 City Dock and Dredge.

19 Q. What details can you give about the stability tests?
20 Do you remember why it was called? Was the boat brand new at
21 the time?

22 A. It was brand new. It was absolutely brand new. We
23 had -- when I first started working for Whaling City in the
24 first part -- and that's why I'm not clear on the year that I
25 started. But we had some smaller boats that were -- I don't

1 remember their size, maybe 30-footers or something like that.
2 And they were open boats with the seats down on the deck. You
3 know, they had the high sides with the seats down on the deck.
4 And they were older boats and -- the business took off. I
5 mean, the sea submarines boat tour was extremely popular. I
6 mean, we would be running eight hours -- the tour is about an
7 hour long and we'd leave with 40 people or whatever, loaded
8 boat, do the tour, come back in, unload that load. You know,
9 we kept three boats going, the two smaller ones and the one
10 larger boat, the 40-footer.

11 And the business just outgrew the two smaller boats.
12 So they had the Dyer 40 built. And I believe that Clarence
13 Sharp and whatever staff he had there that -- you know, there
14 were all kinds of engineers laid out and told Dyer, you know,
15 that they wanted that flush deck for park benches. It was a
16 very simple boat. I mean, really, it was hardly anything to
17 it.

18 Q. Okay. You described the hollow hull. So you don't
19 remember any compartmentalization from the bow to the stern?
20 It was completely open?

21 A. Yeah, I don't remember -- I remember going down there
22 and checking the oil and whatnot. And always -- that was the
23 first experience I had with a fiberglass hull. It amazed me.
24 I remember being down there and seeing daylight, how you can
25 see brightness through a shell coat. And I just remember just

1 being down there in an empty space looking around and seeing
2 daylight, and I was amazed by the boat. So I don't real that
3 there was any bulkheads down there.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. There could have been. I just -- my memory -- I just
6 don't recall it that way. I just recall that diesel sitting
7 down there all by its lonesome with some -- for a battery, and
8 probably a bilge pump. I think that was pretty much.

9 Q. Do you remember who from Whaling City was
10 representing the owner during the stability test? Was there a
11 naval architect there or anyone like that?

12 A. No. To my knowledge and as I recall this thing, I
13 think it was the mechanic was there. And I don't know -- I
14 don't recall if anybody from the front office was there at all.
15 But I do recall that the mechanic was there.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Because he -- they were using some of the equipment
18 to put the sandbags on the boat and it heeled way over. And
19 again, you know, I don't know what the sandbags -- they were
20 like, you know, about the size of a concrete sack or something
21 like that, filled with sand. But I don't know what they
22 weighed. But -- and I don't recall the number. I just
23 remember being amazed heel they induced in it.

24 Q. Okay. There was a great deal of heel?

25 A. Yeah, I was -- I mean, you know, I'd never seen

1 anything like that before. I was looking at it, wow. That's
2 something that impressed me, that they put that much weight on
3 the rail there on those -- on the deck. I don't know if it was
4 on the seats. It must have been on the seats, because they
5 couldn't have put all that -- I don't recall. It might have
6 been on the seats, or it might have just been on the deck. It
7 was right along the gunnel and they induced quite a bit of
8 heel. But you know -- a round-bottom boat, you know.

9 Q. You don't recall any reaction by the Coast Guard to
10 it, the Coast Guard that were doing it?

11 A. No. I mean, they did that and then, you know, life
12 jackets and hit the lights and, you know, pretty much hard. It
13 wasn't a very sophisticated inspection, it seems to me. You
14 know, check fire extinguisher and lights, and just the, you
15 know, bells and whistles that you do on an inspection. It was
16 pretty basic. And the next thing I know, the boat was -- took
17 the sandbags off and the next day we were running it with
18 passengers.

19 Q. Do you remember any bilge alarms?

20 A. No. I don't think we had any bilge alarms. We
21 never -- I don't recall the boat took any water ever.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. The deck -- they had a hatch that was directly over
24 the diesel, but I believe that was bolted down. I don't
25 recall. But I used to check the oil every time -- you know, in

1 the mornings before I started doing the things, and I never saw
2 any water down there.

3 Q. Okay, when you looked at the picture, there have been
4 reports that -- people have looked at the photos now and it
5 appears that the deck has been raised.

6 A. Well, if that deck -- if you d on the dock and the
7 boats there and you -- where the railing -- where we used to
8 have the entranceway was the railing had a chain between the --
9 what I call the doghouse where the helmsman was -- do you know
10 where I'm talking about?

11 Q. Yes, I do.

12 A. Huh?

13 Q. Yes, I do. I know where you mean.

14 A. Yeah, and there was a chain. And that's where people
15 entered and exited the boat. They could walk straight off the
16 dock straight onto the boat. It was just -- they raised the
17 deck up even with the gunnel where the doghouse was. Then the
18 deck remained level, so as the boat sheer picked up near the
19 bow, you know, it was maybe a couple of feet below the gunnel.
20 But right there at the doghouse, that was an even walkway. It
21 was not a step down or a step up. It was an even walk. And
22 the reason that was done is because we -- on the older boats
23 that we had, the first two boats we were originally using for
24 the tour, it was always difficult for the tourists who were
25 uncomfortable with, you know, being on boats or whatever, to

1 step off the dock down onto the gunnel and then step down into
2 the boat itself. So they just made it even back there, and it
3 was all deck. So at the doghouse it was right level with the
4 gunnel.

5 So unless it was raised further than that -- and I
6 can't imagine doing it -- that's the way she -- that's the way
7 we operated it and that's the way we -- that's the way the
8 Coast Guard inspected it.

9 Q. Okay. What I want to do is type up a lot of what
10 you've told us. It wouldn't be probably for another week or
11 two.

12 A. No problem.

13 Q. I've taken notes -- and then just send it to you and
14 have you review it. I can just e-mail it to you.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. Could I get your personal information, too, your
17 address and phone number?

18 A. Yeah, sure.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. The first name is S-T-A-N.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. The last name is Wilusz, W-I-L-U-S-Z, as in zebra.

23 My home address- [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 Q. Okay. And your phone number?

1 A. My home number is [-----]

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And my office number is [-----]

4 Q. Okay, we don't put any of your personal information
5 in our interviews, so you don't have to worry about the public
6 getting a hold of that.

7 A. If you -- if there's some questions about what you
8 think the boat looked like originally versus what she looked
9 like now, if you have some photographs and you want to send
10 them to me that I can comment on, I'd be glad to do that.

11 Q. I think that's a real good idea and we're probably
12 going to do that.

13 A. Yeah, because, you know, I can't tell but it seems to
14 me -- I think you understand what I'm saying about the open
15 railing. It was just wide open. That boat was basically a
16 flat deck with park benches on it and an open railing to keep
17 the people from falling off the sides of the boat.

18 Q. Um-hum, absolutely.

19 A. Very, very unsophisticated.

20 Q. And when the stability test was done that's exactly
21 what they had, correct?

22 A. Yup.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. That was it.

25 Q. Okay. Me and one in the engineering group, we're

1 going to be heading down to Groton tomorrow.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. We've got a lot of bad weather coming up this way --
4 oh, before I go, if you think of anything, just call me on my
5 cell phone. If all of a sudden a boatyard name pops up or
6 maybe a Coast Guard name or anything, because we are --

7 A. Now I can insure you those boats always -- unless
8 something happened later on, but I can almost bet that those
9 boats were hulled -- well, I know they were hulled there at
10 Whaling City. I also know that this was a Clarence Sharp
11 thing. You said he died in -- what, 1976?

12 Q. '74 is what we're hearing.

13 A. '74.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. I bet you those boats were sold shortly after that.

16 Q. Yes, I've talked to his son. And his son said, yes,
17 he -- I guess he inherited it and said he didn't want to deal
18 with the public, and he sold them. So the only other owner is
19 the man that owns it now for Shoreline Cruises.

20 A. Yeah. It was Clarence's pet rock. He loved it. He
21 loved the people. It was just his thing. His house was right
22 there next to the parking lot, and he walked out -- I don't
23 think anybody at Whaling City Dock and Dredge really wanted
24 anything to do with the business, see submarines by boat. But
25 that was Clarence's thing. I interviewed personally with him.

1 He was a sharp, sharp cookie. I can remember -- I don't know
2 if you're familiar with drain barges that they used to use on
3 the lakes.

4 Q. No. No, I don't know.

5 A. Anyway, he bought a series of these things. They
6 were Leaking lie sieves. And he brought them down to Whaling
7 City, floated them down. And we had all the heavy equipment
8 there in the yard. He took them over, sealed -- welded the
9 decks topside shut, tipped them over and welded on new bottoms,
10 and then tipped them back up again. And then he mounted big
11 pumps on them. And he would raise and lower -- when they
12 wanted to raise a section of a bridge -- I remember watching
13 that Gold Star Memorial, the second bridge, get built. They
14 would use those barges. They'd raise and lower the water to
15 move the sections in place up there. And he was a really,
16 really clever guy. So I'm quite confident -- and I can't say
17 for a fact, but I'm quite confident that his fingerprints were
18 all over the design of that boat, that he specified what he
19 wanted from Dyer.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah, I'm not shocked that the boats were sold,
22 because that was his thing. And that doesn't surprise me.

23 Q. Well, you've been very helpful, and I think what you
24 suggested we're going to try to do. You may be getting
25 contacted by either one of two people. One would be a Rob

1 Henry or another would be a Brian Curtis, or it just may be me.

2 And you have obviously a computer at home? Does it read --

3 A. Yes, I do. You have my e-mail, I think.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. It's -----

6 Q. Okay, do you have a CD drive in your computer?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay, because sometimes it's difficult to send some
9 of these photos. They are large files.

10 A. Yeah. No, no, I've got it both at work and at home.

11 Q. That sounds great. And like I say, we're going to be
12 down -- and if you can think of anything in the next day, if
13 you could just give me a call, I'd appreciate it.

14 A. Okay. Well, you know, like I said, I think -- while
15 I was a young man at the time -- I learned to walk on a boat.
16 I worked in my father's boat. We knew a lot of people up in
17 New London, Niantic area. They still know me. And my father
18 was in the business for a very long time. So I knew boats. In
19 fact, I own a 37-foot Sports Fisherman today still.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And so, you know, I had a lot of boating experience
22 under my belt when I went to work for Clarence there.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And that's -- in fact, I'll be honest with you. It
25 was a friend of mine that was in the -- he's a retired navy

1 chief warrant officer who lives in Niantic, Connecticut, who
2 called me up and told me that the boat I used to run had sunk
3 up there, right after the accident happened. And I didn't --
4 you know, I was intrigued by it, but I didn't -- he said he was
5 confident it was one of the boats I used to run. And I didn't
6 think much of it until I saw the Soundings article and I saw
7 the picture. And I go: By damned, Jake was right. That was
8 the boat.

9 Q. Wow.

10 A. I thought that name was "Double Dolphin," or "Dancing
11 Dolphin"?

12 Q. The Double.

13 A. The "Double Dolphin."

14 Q. We're trying to still get the Coast Guard records.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. But the "Double Dolphin," "Sea Lion," and "Seahorse,"
17 I think are the three.

18 A. Yeah. Yup, yup, yup, yup, that's it.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yup. In fact, I'll tell you a story about the
21 "Seahorse." Remember that Italian mechanic I was talking
22 about?

23 Q. Uh-huh.

24 A. We had that one -- something had gone wrong with
25 steering or something. We had lifted that one out of the water

1 right there alongside of the dock on one of the big barges. He
2 did something. He used to hotrod those boats, you know, with
3 nobody on them, with that little diesel. It would scoot -- I
4 don't know, 16, 18 knots. In those days that was pretty fast.
5 And he dropped it in the water. Unfortunate for him, he hooked
6 up the steering backwards, that when he turned the wheel
7 starboard the boat went to port. And he took off with that
8 thing and he went to turn to starboard and she went to port and
9 ran smack into the barge, bounced off. It didn't do any
10 damage, but it was funny to watch, because he was kind of a
11 know it all. I'll never forget that. You know, he was a hot
12 rod.

13 Q. They always get theirs, yup.

14 A. Yup, there you go.

15 Q. Well, I really appreciate your information. And just
16 one thing. Where is Shalimar?

17 A. Shalimar, we're located between Panama City and
18 Pensacola.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. It's called River Cane Alley.

21 Q. Yup, yup. I used to be on a maritime pre-position
22 ship. We'd go into Panama City.

23 A. Okay, we're just down -- the towns here are Fort
24 Walton and Dustin.

25 Q. Okay, got it, got it.

1 A. Okay.

2 Q. Sounds great. And like I say, I think we'll be
3 having people sending you copies of photos and then they'll
4 give you a call and just ask you to identify certain things.

5 A. Okay. I'll be glad to.

6 MR. FORD: thank you very much, Stan.

7 THE WITNESS: You bet. Take care.

8 MR. FORD: You, too.

9 THE WITNESS: Bye.

10 MR. FORD: Bye.

11 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled
12 matter was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: Investigation of MV Ethan Allen
 Lake George, New York
 October 2, 2005
 Interview of Stan Wilusz

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-06-MM-001

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

DATE: December 13, 2005

was held according to the record, and that this is the
original, complete, true and accurate transcript which has been
compared to the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Phyllis Jarvis
Transcriber